

## COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

March 17, 2011

### FITZGERALD MARINE RESERVE COASTAL TRAIL

Project No. 07-020-02

Project Manager: Janet Diehl

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorize disbursement of up to \$250,000 to the County of San Mateo to build a segment of the Coastal Trail, including a bridge over San Vicente Creek, at the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve in the town of Moss Beach in San Mateo County.

**LOCATION:** James V. Fitzgerald Marine Reserve, Moss Beach, San Mateo County (Exhibit 1)

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Public Access

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#### **EXHIBITS**

Exhibit 1: [Project Location](#)

Exhibit 2: [CEQA Documents: Initial Study, Mitigated Negative Declaration, Findings and Conditions of Approval, and Notice of Determination](#)

Exhibit 3: [Site Photographs](#)

Exhibit 4: [Project Letters](#)

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#### **RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends the Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31400 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed two hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$250,000) to the County of San Mateo (“the County”) to construct a segment of the California Coastal Trail at James V. Fitzgerald Marine Reserve in the town of Moss Beach, San Mateo County. This authorization is subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds, the County shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:
  - a. Evidence that the County has obtained all necessary permits and approvals, and
  - b. A final work program, project schedule and budget, including the names of any contractors to be used in the completion of the project.

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2. The County shall implement, or shall cause to be implemented, the mitigation measures contained in the County's July 2010 Mitigated Negative Declaration for the project prepared under the California Environmental Quality Act, attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibit 2.
3. Upon completion of the project, the County shall provide to the Conservancy a written report indicating the implementation of all applicable mitigation measures required in the Mitigated Negative Declaration.
4. The County shall install and maintain sign(s) on the project site, the design, number and placement of which have been approved by the Executive Officer, acknowledging Conservancy funding and identifying the project as a segment of the California Coastal Trail.
5. To the extent appropriate, the County shall ensure that the final designs of the project are consistent with the Conservancy's 'Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development' and with all applicable federal and state statutes, regulations and guidelines governing barrier-free access for persons with disabilities."

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

"Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code regarding public access to the coast.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
3. The proposed project will serve greater than local public needs.
4. The Conservancy has independently reviewed the County's Mitigated Negative Declaration adopted on January 12, 2011 by the County of San Mateo Planning Commission, attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibit 2, and finds that there is no substantial evidence that the project, as mitigated, will have a significant effect on the environment, as defined in 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15382."

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### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends that the Conservancy provide up to \$250,000 to the County of San Mateo to build a quarter-mile segment of the Coastal Trail at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve in the town of Moss Beach in San Mateo County. This project addresses the dire need to replace the San Vicente Creek temporary bridge, which won't last another season due to erosion of the creek banks. If the creek banks further erode and the County is required to remove the temporary bridge, public access from the Reserve's parking lot to the current bluff trail system will be seriously compromised.

The project has two components: 1) Construction of a section of the Coastal Trail from San Vicente Creek to Cypress Avenue, and 2) Construction of a multiple-use non-motorized bridge over San Vicente Creek, connecting the Coastal Trail to the North Lake Street edge of the

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Reserve parking lot. Using the existing dirt pathway known locally as the Dardanelle Trail as the basis for the alignment, the County will improve both the trail and the bridge so that they will be fully compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The 1,500-foot-long trail through the Reserve will accommodate pedestrians, people walking leashed dogs, bicyclists and equestrians (Exhibit 3, Site Photographs). It will be built with *Gravelpave*, a geotextile fabric that is laid on a prepared surface, then filled in with gravel to create a porous and durable load-bearing surface. *Gravelpave* blends in with the natural surroundings and filters storm water. The trail's eight-foot-wide width will accommodate pedestrians and equestrians on separate sides of the trail. It will be identified with California Coastal Trail signs.

Across San Vicente Creek, at the entrance to the trail, the County will install a prefabricated fiberglass clear span bridge 60 feet long and 12 feet wide to replace the temporary bridge. The new bridge is sized to allow for a 100-year flood to flow under it, and to avoid sensitive natural and cultural resources near the creek. Abutments 12 feet wide will span the width of the bridge. Curb cut ramps along the sidewalk on North Lake Street near the trail entrance will allow for accessibility from the parking lot for all trail users.

The trail was designed, with support from the Coastal Conservancy and other agencies, to avoid conflicts between the protection of sensitive resources and the need for public recreation on the bluff, reef and beach areas. It will bypass a pre-historic midden and foundations of an old estate. Coastal Trail hikers will be able to connect to the rest of the Reserve's pedestrian-only dirt trails along the bluff top, to take in views of the ocean and loop back to parking lot.

This is one of three projects that the County has undertaken in recent years to improve public access through the entire Reserve. At the southern end of the Reserve, a reconstructed stairway from the bluff top to Seal Cove Beach was opened to the public this past fall. Designs are also nearing completion for a new ramp to improve visitor access to the Moss Beach Reef, where the Coastal Trail meets the Reserve's visitor center. With more than 125,000 people coming to the Reserve each year to view the intertidal life – including about 23,000 students from more than 100 schools – there is great need for these public access improvements.

### **Site Description:**

The James V. Fitzgerald Marine Reserve is a 402-acre natural resources area on the northern coast of San Mateo County. The Reserve includes 370 acres of intertidal and subtidal marine habitat and 32 acres of upland habitat bluffs, with elevations up to 100 feet. The northern uplands area of the Reserve is distinguished by a 90-year old grove of Monterey Cypress originally planted as a windbreak. To the north and south of this grove, the Reserve is a broad band of shoreline with intermittent beaches and coastal bluffs. A small visitor center/office and a parking area are located on North Lake Street within the Moss Beach neighborhood, adjacent to the Moss Beach Reef.

The Reserve is about 15 miles south of San Francisco via Highway 1, and seven miles north of Half Moon Bay. From Point Montara, the Reserve's boundaries extend three miles south to the southern end of Pillar Point, and 1,000 feet west into the ocean from the mean high tide line. On the eastern side of the reserve is the town of Moss Beach.

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Established in 1969, when the State of California designated this area as a Marine Life Reserve to protect marine plant and animal species, the Reserve is now both a “State Marine Park” and an “Area of Special Biological Significance.” The property is under joint custodianship of the County of San Mateo and the California Department of Fish and Game, with the County managing the land above the high tide line and DFG managing the reef property below mean high tide. An active nonprofit organization, the Friends of Fitzgerald Reserve, provides docent services to the hundreds of school groups and thousands of other people who visit the reserve each year.

The Reserve is one of the richest intertidal areas on the California coast. Extensive shale reefs are home for a wide variety of marine life, such as giant green anemones, limpets, purple sea urchins, crabs and snails. 439 species of marine plants and animals have been found in the Reserve, including several endemic species and 25 marine invertebrate and plant species first discovered at the Reserve.

### **Project History:**

The Conservancy granted matching funds to the County for design of the proposed trail in May 2007. Work on the plans was halted for almost a year during the state’s budget freeze. The design and permit applications were completed in the fall of 2010.

The proposed Coastal Trail project is the most recent in a series of County efforts to improve visitors’ experiences at the property, which is managed by the County Parks Department. In recent years, the County has focused its planning efforts on a new education center at the Reserve and better access to the beaches, the reef, and Pillar Point Marsh. Parks Department staff completed the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve Master Plan in 2002, with partial support from the Conservancy, and has sought funds since then to design and implement the projects included in the plan, including the replacement of the temporary footbridge across San Vicente Creek and the enhancement of the Reserve trail system.

### **PROJECT FINANCING**

Coastal Conservancy	\$250,000.00
CA Dept. of Parks and Recreation	<u>503,600.00</u>
<b>Total Project Costs</b>	<b>\$753,600.00</b>

The anticipated source for the Conservancy funds for this project is an appropriation from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006, Public Resources Code section 75001 *et seq.* (“Proposition 84”). Proposition 84 authorizes the use of bond funds for projects that promote access to the coastal resources of the state and are consistent with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, Public Resources Code § 31000 *et seq.* (Public Resources Code § 75060(b)). Consistency of the project with the

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Conservancy's statutory mission is discussed below in "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation." The proposed project will improve an existing trail to create a new segment of the California Coastal Trail, with a connection to a blufftop trail along the San Mateo County coast. The County of San Mateo has set aside several hundred thousand dollars to assist with the Coastal Trail improvements, and will manage and maintain the trail.

Through the California Department of Parks and Recreation, the County has obtained \$503,600.00 of Proposition 40 per capita grant funds for the proposed project.

### **CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:**

The proposed project is consistent with Division 21, Chapter 9 of the Public Resources Code (Public Resources Code §§ 31400-31409), regarding public access and enjoyment of coastal resources. Section 31400 states that the Conservancy shall have a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline, and Section 31408 directs the Conservancy to coordinate the development of the California Coastal Trail. Funding the proposed Coastal Trail project would be consistent with these sections.

Section 31400.3 states that the Conservancy may assist public agencies in developing and implementing a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline. The proposed project will further these goals by enabling the County to develop a link of the Coastal Trail through a much-visited park. Consistent with Section 31400.1, the proposed grant to the County of San Mateo will serve more than local public needs.

### **CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ACCESS PROGRAM STANDARDS:**

The Fitzgerald Marine Reserve Coastal Trail is consistent with the Conservancy's Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development as follows:

#### **Standard No. 1      Protect Public and Coastal Resources**

The project will be constructed to minimize alteration of natural landforms by utilizing existing abandoned roads. With its gravel surface, the trail will be subordinate to the setting's character.

#### **Standard No. 2      Correct Hazards**

The project will correct the hazard of the public walking on eroding creek banks by constructing a bridge across San Vicente creek that is designed to withstand a 100-year storm.

#### **Standard No. 5      Environmentally Sensitive Areas**

The trail has been designed to avoid adverse impacts on San Vicente Creek and the natural resources of the reserve. Consistent with this standard, the County has submitted the trail plans for the review and approval of the California Coastal Commission and the Department of Fish and Game.

**Standard No. 8 Trails**

The trail will be built with appropriate paving materials and an adequate trail drainage system. Trash receptacles and signs will be included in the project.

**Standard No. 10 Coastal Bikeways**

The trail will be a completely separated right-of-way designated for the exclusive use of bicycles, pedestrians and equestrians. It will meet the Class I Bikeway minimum surface width of eight feet for a two-way path, with provision for a two-foot-wide graded area adjacent to either edge of the path.

**Standard No. 12 Support Facilities**

The trail will include support facilities such as directional and resource interpretation signs.

**Standard No. 13 Barrier-Free Access**

Consistent with this standard, the Coastal Trail will be improved to allow for barrier free access, as required by and consistent with all applicable federal and state statutes, regulations and guidelines governing barrier-free access for persons with disabilities.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2007  
STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective 1B**, the proposed project will result in Coastal Trail signs along a quarter-mile of Coastal Trail.

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective 1D**, the proposed project will result in construction of a quarter-mile of Coastal Trail.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S  
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on June 4, 2009, in the following respects:

**Required Criteria**

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.

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3. **Support of the public:** The proposed project has the support of California State Senator Leland Yee and Assemblymember Jerry Hill, and is supported by local and regional organizations including the San Mateo County Commission on Disabilities, the Friends of Fitzgerald Marine Reserve and the San Mateo County Parks and Recreation Foundation. Project letters are included in Exhibit 4.
4. **Location:** The proposed project is located entirely within the coastal zone in the town of Moss Beach.
5. **Need:** The matching funds for this project expire on June 30, 2011, so the County needs to begin construction immediately. Without Conservancy funding, the County will not have enough money to complete the project. If Conservancy funds are granted, the County is committed to completing the project by the end of the year.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Fitzgerald Marine Reserve is a natural resource of statewide importance, as discussed in the “Site Description” section above. More than 125,000 visitors come to the Reserve each year to view the intertidal life, including students from more than 100 schools.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The proposed trail route traverses areas well outside the elevations projected for sea level rise vulnerability. Rise in sea level is not expected to have any impact on the bridge over San Vicente Creek, due to its distance from the ocean. Maintenance by the County will correct potential erosion from trail use when needed.

### Additional Criteria

8. **Urgency:** The temporary bridge over San Vicente Creek is not projected to last another season, due to erosion of the creek banks. If it is not replaced, visitors won’t have access to the trail system from the Reserve parking lot.
10. **Leverage:** Conservancy funds would be matched approximately 2:1 (see the “Project Financing” section above).
13. **Readiness:** The County has attracted matching funds and attained all necessary permits, and is ready to begin construction upon Conservancy approval.
14. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See “Project History” above.
17. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** The County will use hand tools and other low emissions construction techniques wherever possible when constructing the trail. Some mechanized construction methods will be necessary, but will be kept to a minimum. Because the trail will be for non-motorized use, it will not result in increased emissions.

### **CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the San Mateo County Local Coastal Program (LCP), which contains several policies that support the development of public access improvements specifically at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve. The Shoreline Access Component of the LCP identifies “Site-Specific Recommendations for Shoreline Destinations” in Table 10.6 as follows:

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“Fitzgerald Marine Reserve: Develop access along the bluffs and to the beaches of the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve in stages as public funding is available to adequately improve and manage the access and protect the resources. The access should be oriented to education and nature viewing and interpretation. . . .

Bluff Area North, Lake Street to Cypress Avenue: Consolidate trails into several established trails along the bluff connecting with viewpoints and an eventual continuous trail along the bluff above the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve. . . . Pave sections, at least, of trail for wheelchair accessibility. . . .”

The proposed project will develop access along the bluffs and to the beaches, as directed above, and will consolidate trails along the bluff between Lake Street and Cypress Avenue.

The proposed project also would implement several policies contained in the “Recreation/Visitor Serving Facilities Component” of the LCP. Policy 11.13(a) calls for the establishment of a Coastal Trail system to link existing and proposed recreation facilities along the coast. Consistent with this section, the proposed project would serve to improve linkages between the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve and Pillar Point Marsh. Finally, consistent with Policy 11.24(a)(4), the project would serve to expand the recreational use of an existing publicly owned recreation area.

### **COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the County of San Mateo, as lead agency, undertook environmental assessment of the proposed Fitzgerald Marine Coastal Trail project through an Initial Study. The County incorporated several mitigations into the project plans in order to avoid or minimize adverse impacts. Nevertheless, the Initial Study determined that the proposed project could have possible significant effects on the environment in four areas: land suitability and geology, vegetation and wildlife, air, water and sonic quality, and cultural resources. Based on that Initial Study, the County proposed several mitigation measures to reduce these impacts to levels of insignificance. Those measures were discussed at the County Planning Commission public hearing on January 12, 2011. Based on information provided by staff and evidence presented at the hearing, the Planning Commission approved the project with modified conditions as submitted by Lennie Roberts, Committee for Green Foothills, during the hearing. The County adopted a Mitigated Negative Declaration (attached to this recommendation as Exhibit 2) by resolution of its Planning Commission on January 12, 2011. The County filed its Notice of Determination with the County Clerk and the State Clearinghouse on January 27, 2011.

The potential environmental impacts of the proposed project and the corresponding mitigations are identified and discussed in detail in Exhibit 2. They are summarized below.



## **Land Suitability and Geology**

Impact: Construction of the trail will involve grading within and adjacent to identified riparian corridors, which could have a potentially significant impact on erosion or siltation around San Vicente Creek. This impact will be temporary, persisting only during construction activities.

Mitigation: Prior to the beginning of grading and construction activities, the County will submit to the Planning Department for review and approval an erosion and drainage control plan which shows how the transport and discharge of soil and pollutants from the project site will be minimized. The approved plan will be implemented prior to the beginning of grading activities.

## **Vegetation and Wildlife**

Impact: Construction of the bridge over San Vicente Creek will permanently impact 175 square feet of riparian vegetation. In addition, temporary degradation of habitat during project construction may occur. The County commissioned a biological resources assessment of the project area, which was completed in February 2010 and is included in Exhibit 2. The assessment identified several potential impacts on wildlife and recommended mitigation measures to reduce those impacts to a level of insignificance.

Mitigation: Pre-construction surveys for bats and San Francisco dusky-footed woodrats shall be conducted, and care taken during construction to avoid or relocate these animals. If a lactating female woodrat is found in a nest (stick house), the nest should be left undisturbed for one month until the young are mature enough to be relocated. In order to avoid disturbing nearby Pacific harbor seals, construction noise levels will be kept lower than 160 decibels. A pre-construction breeding bird survey shall be performed, and a buffer area observed around any nesting birds discovered. Several measures shall be taken to avoid potential impacts to the California red-legged frog and the San Francisco garter snake, including: contracting with a biologist approved by the US Fish and Wildlife Service to conduct survey work, crew training, wildlife exclusion fencing, and on-site compliance during all construction activities. Designated construction staging areas will be utilized. Signs will be erected to keep users on proper trails, no trash shall be deposited on site, fueling and maintenance of equipment will be conducted off-site. Special care will be taken to ensure that frogs don't take refuge in pipes and other cavity-like structures. All trenches or deep holes will be covered at the close of each working day. All construction activities will cease one half-hour before sunset and not start earlier than one half-hour before sunrise. Details on these mitigation measures are included on pages 4–11 of the Negative Declaration and in the "Findings and Conditions of Approval" section of the Letter of Decision, both attached to this recommendation as Exhibit 2.

Impact: Installation of a footbridge over San Vicente Creek will permanently impact 0.004 acres of riparian habitat and 0.03 acres of California wild strawberry.

Mitigation: To mitigate for impacts to riparian habitat at the location of the proposed clear span bridge across San Vicente Creek, an adjacent area on the north side of the creek will be planted with willow cuttings, and nearby areas colonized by invasive species will be replanted with native riparian plant species. Impacts to California wild strawberry will be mitigated by replacing ice plant with native strawberry at a 1:1 ratio of planted strawberry habitat to impacted

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area. Both planting compensation projects will be documented through the submittal of a mitigation planting plan, which shall include final success criteria, implementation measures, and a maintenance and monitoring plan. The area of the removed bridge and the old trail alignment will be restored through decompaction or scarifying of the compacted trail area, placement of soil over decompacted areas where appropriate, and revegetation that incorporates species native to the area, including willows adjacent to the stream. The restored areas will be maintained and monitored to ensure success over a five-year period.

### **Air Quality, Water Quality and Sonic**

Impact: During construction, the project could generate significant amounts of dust as a result of the proposed grading work and vehicle travel on paved and/or unpaved surfaces.

Mitigation: The County will implement dust control measures during grading and construction activities, including: watering all active construction sites at least twice daily; covering all trucks hauling soil, sand and other loose materials; stabilizing soils on all unpaved access roads, parking areas and staging areas at the site; sweeping the streets daily if visible soil material is carried onto adjacent public streets, and ensuring that any stockpiles of dirt or sand are enclosed, covered, watered twice daily or treated with non-toxic soil binders.

Impact: During construction, noise could be generated at levels greater than the ambient noise level in the project area. Residences near the site could be affected by the anticipated noise increase.

Mitigation: The County will ensure that noise produced by construction activities does not exceed the 80-dBA level. No construction will take place before 7:00 a.m. or after 6:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. No construction will take place on Saturdays, Sundays or any national holiday.

### **Aesthetic, Cultural and Historic**

Impact: Because an archeological site has been identified in the area of the proposed Coastal Trail, caution must be exercised to avoid disturbing the site.

Mitigation: The County will use methods with the least impact possible to install the bridge over San Vicente Creek. Pilings will be installed using a small vibratory hammer mounted on a small rubber tired or tracked Bobcat (or similar equipment). Heavy equipment will be rubber-tired or tracked and of the smallest size necessary to complete any earthwork. Pilings will be placed within the smallest area possible. Straw layer/wood mats will be placed by hand and removed by hand to avoid surface disturbance around areas within the archeological site. During construction of the trail, an archeological monitor will have the authority to temporarily halt any ground disturbing construction if any archeological materials are inadvertently exposed. Ten additional measures that the County will be required to follow to preserve archeological resources are listed on pages 16-17 of the Negative Declaration attached as Exhibit 2 to this recommendation.

**Conclusion**

After reviewing the Mitigated Negative Declaration and its Mitigation and Monitoring Program, Conservancy staff concurs with the County's finding that the trail construction project, as mitigated, will not have a significant effect on the environment. Staff recommends that the Conservancy, as a responsible agency under CEQA, also make this finding. Upon approval, staff will file a Notice of Determination.